

Old Testament: Habakkuk 3: 17 - 19

New Testament: John 8: 31 - 38 and Galatians 5: 1

Please join me in prayer. And now Lord God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts, be pleasing and acceptable in Thy sight our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

It's as if humanity has some sick, twisted desire to *remain* captive to shame. We could choose to, both individually and corporately, confess what is wrong both individually and corporately; in our personal lives and in our communal lives. We could confront the things that we do not wish to confront. Instead, the majority of us continue to practice shame and bury things further down and ignore them. Or, we deny them and continue to come up with excuses or find different scapegoats. I am the way I am because of a, b, c, and d. Not because of my own personal life choices. *They* are the way *they* are because of a, b, c, and d not because they are human and not being treated as such. This has its roots in shame. This idea that I am so dirty and rotten and disgusting, so sinful, and if I am then so is everybody else, that neither I nor anyone else is even *worth* the aforementioned efforts of confronting these horrible things about us. So, we try to struggle forward while lugging behind us, both individually and communally, these enormous rucksacks, plural, of shame that we'd just rather not deal with. And we ignorantly assume that what's past is past; don't learn from it, don't re-examine it, while ignoring the huge rucksacks we continue to lug behind us.

In our reading from John the Jews who believed in him, they are not quite disciples yet, are experiencing the exact problem I just described. Jesus offers them a reason for joy! A reason for hope! Good news in the form of an "if, then" proposition. If you abide in Jesus' word, his preaching and teaching, you are truly a disciple! Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free! The Jews then have the gall to say to Jesus that we're the offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone! How can *you* say, Jesus, that we will become free? Uh .... The last time I checked my Jewish history the offspring of Abraham were enslaved in Egypt and Moses had to come and set them free. Then, the northern kingdom of Israel was overrun by Assyria who captured and enslaved the offspring of Abraham. After that, it was the southern kingdom of Judah that was overrun by Babylon who captured and enslaved the offspring of Abraham. Not to mention the vendetta for wholesale slaughter and genocide by Haman that was narrowly averted by Queen Esther and the reality that those disciples were worshipping at the *second* Temple that was rebuilt by Nehemiah after the first was raised to the ground and destroyed. I mean, the disciples are blissfully unaware that they are dragging around ginormous rucksacks full of shame and trauma around slavery that continues to today! Modern times. Every

Chanukah, part of the Seder plate is the call to remember the bitterness of slavery in Egypt!

So Jesus, in a remarkable display of restraint that he doesn't just clunk all of their heads together, clarifies for them and for us. Everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. We know this to be true. Everyone who lies, finds it easier and easier to keep lying. Everyone who cheats, finds it easier and easier to keep cheating. Everyone who steals, finds it easier and easier to keep stealing. Because the shame grows! Instead of confronting it and fighting it, we become a slave to it. We become captive to the shame of doing the things, of practicing the things, we know we shouldn't be practicing! And Jesus is like, listen, truth is truth. The slave does not remain in the house forever. BUT, the son does remain forever. So, if the Son sets you free, then you will indeed be free. Beloved ones, hear me. What is our joy in Christ? What is our joy in being a Christian? It is *not* that we can be sinless; that we can never sin, never make a bad choice, never make a bad decision. Hear me, our joy is that Jesus sets us free from the *shame* of sin; from the *shame* of our bad choices and bad decisions both individually and communal. We are free to drop the giant rucksacks we're carrying behind us; to open them and rummage through them and confront and deal with all the sad, traumatic, hurtful things that our shame has prevented us from dealing with all these years. Confronting, handling and dealing with our "stuff", you know what I mean, is what Jesus sets us free to do. Our personal stuff and our communal stuff. And there is joy in that! The joy is no longer being captive, being a slave, to shame. The shame that keeps us sinning; lying, cheating and making repeated bad decisions and choices. And this freedom to handle and deal with our stuff is exactly what Paul is referring to in Galatians. For freedom from the shame of being a slave to sin, Christ has set us free to handle our stuff. Don't go back to the slavery of shame.

And for good measure Jesus really rams his point home. I know that you're the offspring of Abraham. I get it! What is implied is that I'm the offspring of Abraham too guys. Yet, you seek to kill me, one of your own because my word, my preaching and teaching, finds no place in you. That has got to sting. Jesus is like, that's great about the label you assign to yourself, "offspring of Abraham", "Christian", but do you actually hear and put into practice the words, the preaching and teaching of the Son of God? "Be doers of the word, and not only hearers who deceive themselves" is how James puts it. And then Jesus turns the screws just a bit more so that the point cannot be missed nor mistaken. I speak of what I have seen with my Father, God the Father, and you do what you have heard from your father. There's a difference between what God the Father tells us, and what our forefathers tell us. We've got work to do distinguishing the differences and confronting the shames of our past.

The good news is, our joy is, that we are free to deal; free to handle our stuff. Our joy is that, in Jesus, when we make those choices we will have victory. We can faithfully and confidently sing “I’m gonna see a victory because the battle belongs to you Lord” precisely because we are free to overcome our shame and live free from it. Thanks be to God.